

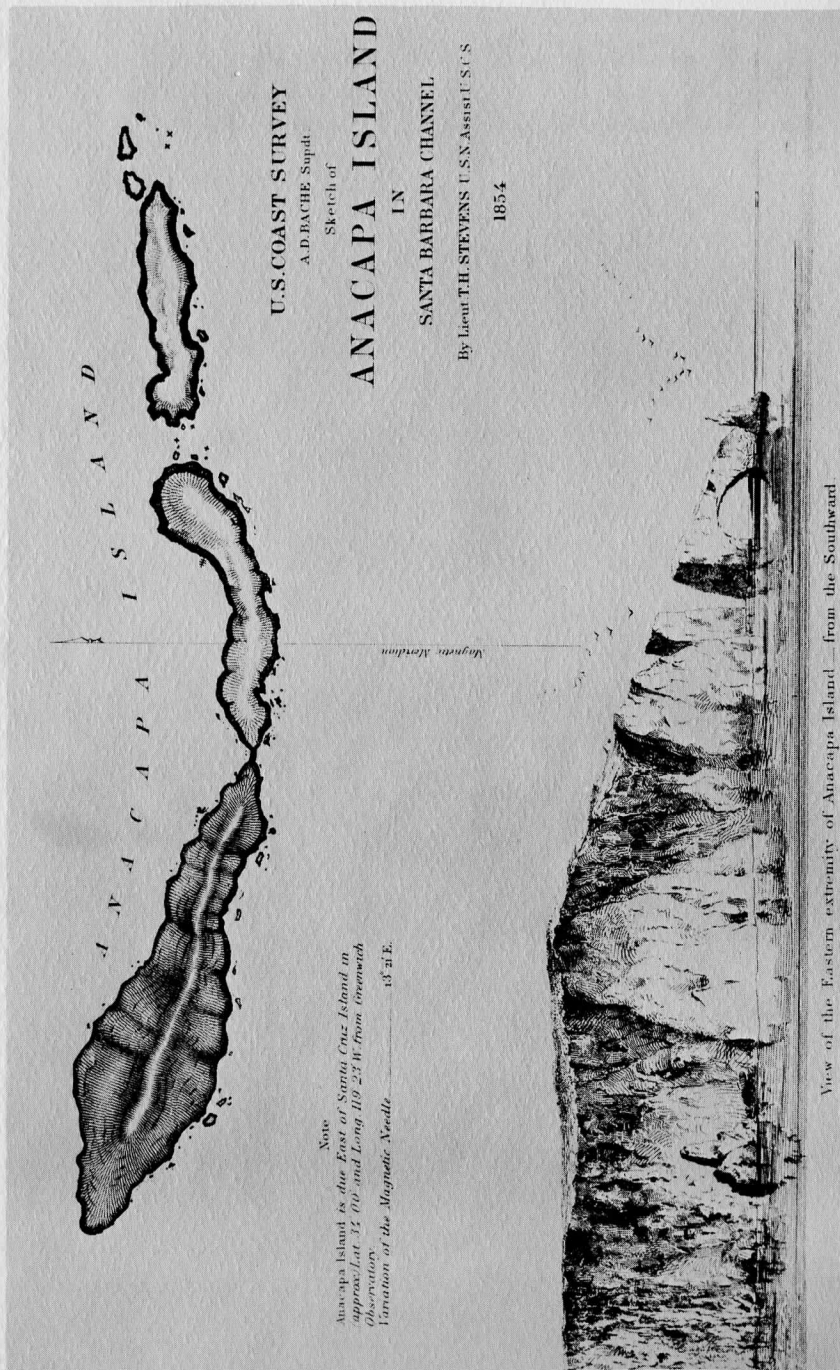
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NOTICIAS



Captain Antonio Maria de la Guerra

S.B. Historical Society



Whistler's version of Anacapa Island, U.S. Coast Survey

S.B. Historical Society

WHISTLER AND THE COAST SURVEY

By Stella Haverland Rouse

A governmental body frequently mentioned in connection with Pacific Coast affairs is the Coast and Geodetic Survey, which has provided aids to coastal navigation for many years by means of nautical charts and reports of harbor and coastline conditions. The Survey, founded in 1807, is the oldest technical and scientific organization in the Government. President Thomas Jefferson was authorized by Congress to establish a survey of the eastern coast.

The service first was called the Coast Survey, but after geo-magnetic surveying was authorized in 1843 and geodetic surveying was instituted in 1871, the name was changed to Coast and Geodetic Survey. As duties of the agency have been expanded with the introduction of modern transportation facilities, the agency has become responsible for aeronautical charts, and has also been assigned seismological studies, and many other functions evolved because of modern inventions and developments.

In the 1850s the Coast Survey was studying the Pacific as well as the Atlantic Coast when James (Abbott) McNeill Whistler brought attention to Santa Barbara because of his brief employment in the Coast Survey. The word "mother" usually is the one associated with Whistler because of his painting, "Arrangement in Black and Gray, No. 1," done in Europe in 1872. However, his name is connected with Anacapa Island in many of his biographies. The Literary Digest in July, 1931, devoted an article to his aberrations in the Survey office, and the Los Angeles Times recognized the centennial of his sketch of Anacapa Island with seagulls flying overhead, with a story in September, 1954.

Whistler was the son of George Washington Whistler, who enlisted in the American Army after surrendering as a British soldier at Saratoga. He entered the new Military Academy at West Point, and became a distinguished Army Engineer. He helped survey the boundary between the United States and Canada, and later was an important figure in planning railroad routes over the United States. He was engaged for the Czar's Russian railroad project, and the family lived in Russia for several years, where the young Whistler was exposed to art and was enrolled in the Imperial Academy at St. Petersburg.

James' mother took the children to London for a while, and the young boy stayed in London with his older half-sister and her husband, where he had further contact with the art world. He wrote to his father in Russia that he wanted to be a painter, saying that he hoped that his dear mother (a rather puritanical woman) would not object to that career. She wrote back that she would like to have him become something more practical, like an architect or an engineer.

Whistler's father succumbed to cholera and a rheumatic heart in Russia April 9, 1849, and James' mother brought their children back to America in July. Up to that time the family had been fairly affluent, since Major Whistler as a railroad planner had earned a large salary, approximately \$1000 a month.

Because of their current strained financial circumstances due to the death of the breadwinner, and because Mrs. Whistler's brother, too, had attended West Point, Mrs. Whistler decided that the young man should

secure an all-expense-paid college education in engineering and military tactics at West Point. Through the influence of friends, Whistler was appointed at the age of sixteen. However, his temperament was not suited to discipline and a military life, and in the academic field he did not receive high grades. He had been number one in drawing, however, where, in addition to his class work, he sketched caricatures of the cadets, officers and visitors, instead of applying himself to his studies.

After he was dismissed from the academy at the end of his third year because of poor grades and many conduct demerits, he secured work in Baltimore with the family of an older half brother, but there, as an apprentice draftsman, he disrupted office routine.

In November, 1854, he found a new job with a Captain Benham, an official of the Coast Survey in Washington, and a former friend of his father. There views of harbors, landmarks, coastal marks, etc. were reproduced as navigational aids. Production was from copper plates, and in learning to do those, the results presaged his undisciplined reproduction of maps, for in a two-day instructional period, he added to the margin of a copper plate drawing of Boston Harbor, several heads of people. But his map work was finely done, so he was employed at \$1.50 a day.

His well-publicized drawing of Anacapa Island was done a short time later. A Navy lieutenant, working as an assistant in the Coast Survey, sent a report to headquarters recommending against establishing a lighthouse on Anacapa Island. Accompanying it was a sketch by W.B. McMurtrie of the "eastern extremity of Anacapa Island, from the southward," as well as a map of the island. Whistler added two flights of seagulls to the sketch, which his supervisors promptly deleted. A few years ago, a News-Press reporter stated that Whistler was on the Coast Survey boat, but that was not the case.

Hours of employment at his office were from nine to three, but Whistler seldom arrived on time, because he found night diversions with old family friends, which kept him up till late hours. Once a fellow draftsman was assigned to bring him to work on time, but that procedure was unsuccessful because when called upon about 8:30 in the morning, Whistler dressed in a leisurely fashion, made coffee for himself and his guest, and dawdled so much that they both arrived about 10:30.

He was so bored with map-making that sums were deducted from his pay for absenteeism. Whether he resigned or was dismissed is not known, but he was unemployed by February 12, 1855, after having learned the process of etching in a very demanding school.

He had intended to stay at the Coast Survey for a year, then go abroad and study, so he went to Europe to study art. His brother, George, promised his fare for the trip and a monthly allowance. From that time forward, Whistler was a painter and etcher, and while many of his studies are of people, there are a number of European waterway scenes, which could be reminiscent of his Coast Survey sketching.

COAST SURVEY REPORTS

The Gledhill Library has a rare old volume of 1855 Coast Survey reports which arrived during the year when Whistler left that office. The *Report of the Superintendent* reveals some of the topics studied by the men, for the information of mariners and prospective settlers.

Among the questions of particular importance that year were the location of lighthouses on the coast and on the Channel Islands. There was an unfavorable opinion regarding placing lighthouses on Santa Cruz or Anacapa, because of the steep terrain, lack of water and heavy surf. One report recommended a light on San Miguel, which, with another at Point Concepcion, would guide ships to the western entrance of the Santa Barbara Channel.

A report February 5, 1855, recommended a light at Santa Barbara harbor, because wood, water and building materials were convenient to the site, and land could be bought from the city reasonably. By the end of that year a lighthouse was constructed.

In a chapter on the physical geography of the mountain ranges of California, the report pointed out the contrast between the Atlantic coastline and the Pacific, and the lack of many suitable harbors along our coast due to the steep terrain.

Off the Pacific Coast in several spots from Point Concepcion to San Diego, "submerged mountain chains" were valuable to the geographer and hydrographer, since they indicated the probable position of shoals, rocks and longitudinal valleys beneath the sea.

Point Concepcion received due recognition as a "prominent feature in the outline of the California coast between San Francisco and the peninsula of California." It was recognized as the "Hatteras of the Pacific," and a place where mariners noticed a sudden change of climate and meteorological conditions. Reports noted that navigators approaching the Santa Barbara Channel could recognize their location by "the peculiar odor of bitumen in the region of a bitumen pit eight miles west of Santa Barbara."

The surveyors "discovered" a "rich mine of sulphur" on the coast fifteen miles west of Ventura, where the ground was very hot.

The kelp of our channel was compared to that of the Straits of Juan de Fuca. A surveyor reported that the immense fields of kelp floating offshore here could be a good source of income, if proper equipment and laborers were available for harvesting. (Years later commercial kelp harvesting flourished here.) Navigators were warned of encountering kelp beds that fouled their equipment.

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CAPTAIN WILLIAM E. GREENWELL

By Stella Haverland Rouse

The name most frequently associated with the Coast Survey in Santa Barbara was that of Captain William E. Greenwell, who served with the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey for almost forty years. He was born in Maryland in 1824, and graduated from Georgetown College. After studying law with a judge in Washington, D.C., for a while, he joined the Coast Survey on the Gulf of Mexico for a time, and in 1855 was transferred to the coast of California, taking charge of a party of surveyors under General Ord. He worked in Washington, D.C., during the early part of the Civil War, then in 1863 returned to California to rejoin the coast survey here, becoming expert in working out a practical scheme of triangulation along the coast. During his first years of duty along the Pacific Coast he used as his transport ship the schooner Humboldt, chartered by the government for this service.¹

On January 1, 1872, the *Press* announced that Captain Greenwell was erecting a handsome residence on the corner of Bath and Montecito Streets (303 W. Montecito).² It had a frontage of thirty-six feet on Montecito Street and fifty-four feet on Bath Street, exclusive of a rear wing eighteen by twenty-four feet. The first story was fourteen feet high, the second, thirteen feet. There were eight rooms, fitted with modern improvements which included gas, water pipes, also a bathroom and eight closets.

The frame structure, well timbered and braced, was set on a solid stone masonry foundation. Outside of the frame structure there were brick walls. The roof was "finished with pediments on each side, with a heavy bracket finish. The bay window, portico and observatory roofs are concave on the upper surface, the latter being surmounted with an iron railing." The portico had a bracket and open finish, supported by composite columns. The mullion and bay windows had "double pilasters, cast iron caps, etc."

The observatory was commodious, and afforded a "charming view of the harbor and town." The westerly projection of the building provided the parlor and family chamber with an alcove, lighted on each side.

Off the chamber was a large dressing room separated from it by sliding doors. The parlor was provided with a bay window. The main hall was eight feet wide; stairs were a half circle, finished with fillets and brackets; there were black walnut railings, over which hung a circular dome light set with ground cut glass. The windows were glassed with one light of glass in each sash. P.J. Barber was the architect, "Mr. Orr" was the carpenter, and "Mr. Joy", the mason. It was badly damaged in the 1925 earthquake.

Like many other Yankee homes here, it was built on a block of land. Captain Greenwell owned another portion of land nearby, and invested in other property in the surrounding area. It was located in the lower part of town where wells could be sunk and water easily obtained. The homes of more affluent residents frequently were built on comparatively large parcels of land, with many shrubs, an orchard of fruit trees and space for a garden.

Although Captain Greenwell's earlier years here were occupied with work for the Coast Survey which frequently took him out of town, he participated in many Santa Barbara activities later. He was one of the founders and promoters of the Union Club, organized March 18, 1872. It was formed as a social club for quiet entertainment, by the most prominent people socially and intellectually. Monthly dues were \$5 at first, later

reduced several times, finally to \$1.50, so that it was less exclusive than when founded. There were attractive quarters in the Odd Fellows Building, with good books and billiard tables.

After about ten years the club was dissolved over the issue of establishing Santa Barbara's hotel and business district "uptown" or "downtown." Some members kept the name of the Union Club and moved to State and Canon Perdido Streets; the others stayed in their old quarters and reorganized as the Pioneer Club. Greenwell was one of the supporters of this group.³

An event by which many Santa Barbarans remembered Captain Greenwell was the shooting of a lion near his home August 25, 1882.⁴ Reports by "a number of sensible and reliable citizens" of sighting a lion prowling around the lower part of the city in August, 1882, had stirred considerable concern among residents, who could hardly believe the stories. Israel Miller, president of the Gun Club, called a meeting of members for a systematic search of the area discussed. Not only members of the Gun Club, but marksmen from Goleta and Carpinteria, as well as interested citizens who had "sufficient energy and pluck," were invited to meet at Miller's store at 2 o'clock on the afternoon of August 26 for their raid.

The Gun Club wanted dogs, too, to aid in searching a dozen different localities from the marshy areas of the Arroyo Burro to the Mesa hills and swampy Burton Mound and brushy Mission Creek. But the club asserted that it wanted no crowd of curious men or boys to hamper the serious activity, conducted "under the strictest discipline," and subject to the orders of "Captain Brown."⁵

That hunt never took place, for the lion was killed on the morning of August 25, according to the *Weekly Press*, August 26, 1882. The incident was "so remarkable that the report was at first received with much incredulity." Charlie Greenwell and H. Grey were given credit for slaying the beast. The lion was believed to be ravenously hungry, for his body showed that he was very emaciated. He had been seen prowling around Burton Mound early in the morning, and a number of men were hunting him with dogs and guns. He was spotted by Charlie Greenwell and Pierce Curran "coming up Montecito Street from the direction of the creek."

When the animal jumped upon the porch of the Greenwell home, and then stuck its head through the open window of the dining room, the ladies in the house thought it was a dog. Then, on recognizing the beast as a wild one, "a hasty exit was made from the breakfast table."

Outside, Greenwell and Curran thought the animal was weak from hunger, for it seemed indifferent to their presence. Seeing that its tail protruded through the picket fence, Curran attempted to grasp it and capture the monster. But he decided differently when the animal responded with an infuriated bound and a threatening snarl. Mr. Grey secured a gun and fired a shot into the lion's jaw, then Greenwell fired a shot into the lion's heart as he was about to spring on his pursuers.

The *Press* emphasized that this incident was "remarkable" because the Greenwell residence was "situated several blocks inside the city limits, and only a few blocks from the central portion of the town." It was believed to have come down from the mountains, striking the beach below Santa Barbara, and then to have followed the shore to Burton Mound.

San Francisco newspapers enjoyed exaggeratedly publicizing any unusual happenings in Santa Barbara, much to the disgust of Santa Barbarans. The *Weekly Independent*, September 2, 1882, quoted the story as it appeared in the San Francisco paper—that the animal had gone onto a porch and leaped through an open window into the room where members of the family were eating breakfast. Our local editor asked facetiously, “Why didn’t the telegraph reporter get the full story,” that “the lion not only went through the window, but devoured the breakfast that had been prepared for the family, while they sat back in amazement, and on leaving, left his card?”

The lion shooting led to excited accounts of other lions seen about town. On October 18 the *Press* reported that one had been seen “prowling about the Brewery this side of Burton Mound.”⁶ A dog had been set on the beast, which retreated into some willows, and a few minutes later the canine emerged howling and bleeding, apparently injured by the lion’s claws.

Residents speculated that the animal was the mate of the one shot by Charlie Greenwell and his friend a short time earlier. The reporter urged that some of the “good shots which Santa Barbara boasts” should organize a lion hunt to dispose of the beast, or, if necessary, the City Council should employ somebody to watch the spot for a few days and rid the city of the unwelcome and potentially dangerous prowler.

After a lion hunt was planned for Saturday, October 28, a number of “old hunters” like I.K. Fisher and “Mr. Vance” reported that they saw its tracks “by a spring in the willows bordering Mission Creek between Mr. Packard’s vineyard and the central portion of the city” (on West Carrillo Street, between San Pascual and Rancheria Streets). Fifteen well-armed citizens led by Captain Chet Brown and Israel Miller searched the bed of Mission Creek and the brushy hill back of the Mesa, and concluded that the animal probably lived somewhere in the wooded canyons of Hope Ranch, and visited Santa Barbara at night for food and water. Swine and poultry in the vicinity were missing, and Captain Brown offered \$10 to anybody who slew the beast.⁷ That ended newspaper publicity, and apparently the animal disappeared, or citizens found other topics for concern.

Captain Greenwell lived to be 62 years of age, dying here of “edema of the lungs,” August 27, 1886.⁸ Captain and Mrs. Greenwell had been close friends of Judge and Mrs. Charles Fernald, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas B. Dibblee, Captain and Mrs. M.M. Kimberly, Dr. and Mrs. James B. Shaw and Henry Stoddard. Their names appeared in lists of guests at many social gatherings. He had acquired many pieces of property here, besides his home place. In the family also was the Greenwell tract, a large acreage including that on which the Samarkand Hotel was established in the 1920s.⁹

Among Captain Greenwell’s survivors was his son, Charles B. Greenwell, a civil engineer who lived in Ventura County for many years, but who died in Santa Barbara July 11, 1912, while visiting his mother at her home on Montecito and Bath Streets.¹⁰ In the 1880s he was respectively city engineer of Santa Barbara and deputy surveyor of Ventura County. In 1898 he was elected a member of the Assembly from Ventura County, and in 1900 was chosen State Senator from the district comprising the counties of Santa Barbara and Ventura. After retiring from those duties, he engaged in the grading and construction business as a member of the firm of

Donlon and Greenwell.

Another son, Arthur C. Greenwell, died at the age of 67 September 27, 1931, following injuries suffered in an accident while he was arranging for a dinner at the Yacht Club for yachtsmen in the Santa Barbara to San Francisco Yacht Club Race.¹¹ He had been active in the yacht Club since it had been reorganized in 1887, and was well known in coastal yachting circles. At one time, he served as Collector of Customs at Santa Barbara.¹² One of his daughters was Mrs. Roy Overbaugh, living then in New York. Roy Overbaugh was an early motion picture cameraman in Santa Barbara.

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